

Introduction to Karl Marx's

The Class Struggles in France

1848 to 1850

by Frederick Engels

This work, republished here, was Marx's first try to explain a part of recent history using his view that history is shaped by the economy of his time. In *The Communist Manifesto*, he used this idea in a broad way to look at all of modern history. In the articles by Marx and by me in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, this idea was used over and over to understand the political events of the day. Here, the goal was to show how events over many years were linked in a way that was very important for all of Europe. It was meant to show that, in the end, political events come from economic causes.

If we judge events as they happen, we can never fully go back to the true economic causes. Even now, even though the news gives us lots of details, it is still hard—even in England—to follow every day the changes in industry and trade around the world and the ways things are made. These many factors are complicated and always changing. They often work quietly for a long time before suddenly becoming very obvious. We can only get a clear picture of the economic history of a period after we collect and study all the information. Statistics help, but they always come later. For this reason, people writing about current events often have to treat the key economic situation as unchanging for the whole time, or they only notice changes that are very obvious.

So, the materialist method often limits itself to showing that political conflicts come from the struggles between the interests of different social classes and parts of classes that arise from economic changes, and it shows that the political parties are the clear political expressions of these groups. It is clear that ignoring the small changes in the economy while studying events can lead to mistakes. But even though writing current history always has some errors, that does not stop anyone from trying to write it.

When Marx began this work, the problems he talked about were even harder to avoid. During the Revolution of 1848-49, it was simply impossible to watch or understand all the economic changes happening at the same time. It was the same during his first months away from home in London in the fall and winter of 1849-50. But that was exactly when Marx started this work. Even though things were very difficult, his careful knowledge of France's economy before the February Revolution and of its political history afterward helped him show how events were connected in a way no one had ever shown before. Later, his work passed a very tough test that he set for it.

The first test came after spring 1850 when Marx found time to study the economy again. He began by looking at the economic history of the past ten years. What he had guessed from limited information became clear from the facts. He found that the world trade crisis of 1847 was the real cause of the February and March revolutions, and that the growing industrial success that started in the middle of 1848 and reached its peak in 1849 and 1850 was the power behind a stronger reaction in Europe. This was very important. In the first three articles, which appeared in the January, February, and March issues of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*

Politisch-ökonomische Revue, Hamburg, 1850, there was still hope for a quick new burst of revolutionary energy. But the historical review written by Marx and me for the last double issue (from May to October) published in the fall of 1850 ended these false hopes once and for all: “A new revolution is possible only in consequence of a new crisis. It is, however, just as certain as this crisis.” That was the only big change needed. Nothing else had to be changed in the way the events were explained or in the cause-and-effect links, as shown by the story from March 10 to the fall of 1850 in that review. I have included this part as the fourth article in the new edition.

The second test was even tougher. Right after Louis Bonaparte’s coup d’état on December 2, 1851, Marx wrote again about the history of France from February 1848 until that event, which ended the revolutionary period for the time being. (Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte. Third edition, Hamburg, Meissner, 1885) In this small book, the time period in our current publication is covered again, but in a shorter way. If you compare this second version, written after the important event that happened over a year later, with our work, you will see that the writer had to change very little.

Our work is very special because it was the first to show the idea that workers’ parties around the world agree on when they quickly explain what they want to change in the economy—that society should take over the ways things are made. In the second chapter, when talking about the “right to work” (called the first rough idea that sums up the working class’s demands), it says that behind the right to work is control over money and property; behind that, the taking over of the means of production so that they are controlled by the working class, which would end wage labor, capital, and the ties between them. In this way, for the first time, the idea was set out that makes modern workers’ socialism very different from the many types of feudal, rich, small-scale, and other kinds of socialism, and from the confused sharing of goods found in utopian and early workers’ communism. Later, when Marx added that society should also take over the ways things are traded, this extra idea, which was clear after the Communist Manifesto, was just a side point to the main idea. Some clever people in England have recently said that society should also control the ways goods are shared. These people would have a hard time explaining what these ways of sharing (different from the ways things are made and traded) really are—unless they mean things like taxes and help for the poor, such as the Sachsenwald and other funds. But first, these are already in society’s control, either by the state or by the community, and second, it is exactly these that we want to get rid of.

When the February Revolution began, all of us, when thinking about how revolutions start and go, were strongly influenced by past history, especially that of France. France had shaped all of European history since 1789, and now it was once again showing a sign for big change. So it was natural that our ideas about the kind

and way of the “social” revolution announced in Paris in February 1848—the revolution of the working class—were strongly mixed with memories of the examples from 1789 and 1830. Also, when the Paris uprising was followed by winning rebellions in Vienna, Milan, and Berlin; when all of Europe, even up to the Russian border, joined the movement; when in Paris, in June, the first big battle for power between the working class and the rich class was fought; and when the working class’s victory scared the rich class in every country so much that they ran back to the old ways of monarchy and feudalism which had just been overthrown—there was no doubt for us that the great final battle had begun. We knew it would be a long and difficult revolution, and that it could only end with the working class winning in the end.

After the losses of 1849, we did not share the false hopes of the common democrats who gathered around the future temporary governments in partibus (in the lands of non-believers—a phrase added to the title of Catholic bishops sent to non-Christian countries). These common democrats expected a quick and final win by the “people” over the “tyrants”; we expected a long struggle after the “tyrants” were removed, because we saw that fighting parts were hidden within the “people” itself. The common democrats thought that trouble would start again very soon; but as early as the fall of 1850 we said that at least the first part of the revolution was over and nothing would happen until a new world economic crisis began. Because of that, we were cast out as traitors to the revolution by the very people who later, almost without exception, made peace with Bismarck—as long as Bismarck thought they were worth it.

But history has also shown that we were wrong, and it has made clear that our view at that time was just an illusion. History has done more than just prove our ideas false; it has completely changed the conditions in which the working class must fight. The way of struggle from 1848 is now outdated in every way, and this point deserves a closer look today.

Every revolution so far has ended with one class being replaced by another, yet every ruling class has always been only a small group compared to the many people they rule. One small ruling group was overthrown, and another small group took its place and reshaped the state institutions for its own interests. In every case, a small group was allowed to rule because of the level of economic development at the time. For that reason—and only for that reason—the majority of the people either joined the revolution to help the small group or simply accepted it. If we set aside the specific details of each case, the common pattern in all these revolutions is that they were ruled by a minority. Even when most people participated, they did so, whether they knew it or not, only to serve a minority, and because the majority stayed quiet, that small group seemed to represent all the people.

Usually, after the first great success, the winning minority split into two groups. One group was happy with what had been gained, and the other wanted to push further and made new demands that were, at least partly, in the real or apparent interest of the large mass of people. Sometimes these more radical demands were

actually met, but often only for a short time; then the more moderate group took control again, and some or all of the new gains were lost. The defeated side then cried betrayal or blamed their loss on chance. In truth, the real fact was this: the gains of the first victory were only kept safe by the second victory of the more radical group; once that was achieved, and with it what was needed at that moment, the radicals and their gains disappeared from the scene again.

Every modern revolution, starting with the great English Revolution of the seventeenth century, had these features that always came with a revolution. These features also applied to the working class's fight for freedom. In 1848, only a few people knew how this freedom should be reached. Even after the win in Paris, the working masses did not know what to do next. But the movement was still strong, natural, and unstoppable. Wasn't this the kind of situation where a revolution had to succeed, even if it was led by a small group? Yet this time the small group worked for the best interest of the many. In many revolutions, the small groups fooled the many people with false promises, so why would the people not listen to ideas that truly showed their real economic needs—even if those needs were not clear at first but only felt as a vague feeling? It is true that the people's excitement often faded quickly into tiredness or even the opposite once they saw that the promises were just illusions and they were disappointed. But here the ideas were not lies. They were meant to put into action the most important interests of the many people. Even though these interests were not clear at first, they would become clear as they were put into practice because they were obvious and convincing. And when, as Marx showed in his third article in the spring of 1850, the new government born from the 1848 social revolution put real power in the hands of the rich people—who acted like kings—while also gathering all the other groups, such as peasants and small business people, around the working class, it meant that after the common victory the experienced working class had to be the key force. Wasn't there a chance then to change a revolution led by a few into a revolution for all?

History has shown that we were wrong, and so were others who thought like us. It made clear that Europe's economy at that time was not ready to end capitalist production. This was proven by the economic revolution that started in 1848, which spread over the whole continent and made big industry strong in France, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and, more recently, in Russia, while Germany became a top industrial country—all based on capitalism, which in 1848 still had a lot of room to grow. But this industrial revolution made class differences very clear. It got rid of many old ways from when things were made by hand and even from guild work in Eastern Europe. It created a true rich class and a real large industrial working class, making them the main groups in society. Because of this, the fight between these two big classes, which in 1848 happened mostly in Paris and a few large cities outside England, has now spread all over Europe and become much stronger than ever before. Back then, there were many unclear religious ideas offering quick fixes; today there is one clear and well-known theory by Marx that plainly explains the main goals of the struggle. In the past, the

people were divided by where they lived and by their nations, joined only by their shared suffering, and were confused, swinging from hope to despair. Today, there is one strong international group of socialists that grows every day in number, organization, discipline, understanding, and confidence of victory. If even this strong group of workers has not yet reached its goal, and if they must slowly move from one step to the next in a long, tough fight instead of winning with one big move, it only shows that in 1848 it was impossible to change society with just a surprise attack.

A rich class split into two parts that supported kings and queens, and they mainly wanted peace and security for their money matters. They faced a working class that had been defeated but was still dangerous, a working class around which small business people and farmers were gathering more and more. This constant threat of a violent uprising, even though it offered no real chance for a lasting fix, was just the situation that suited the coup d'état of the so-called democratic pretender, Louis Bonaparte. On December 2, 1851, using the army, he ended the tense situation and brought internal peace to Europe, though this peace also started a new era of wars. This ended the time of revolutions led by the people and began a time of revolutions led from above.

Returning to the empire in 1851 showed clearly that the working class's dreams were not yet mature. But that change also made it possible for those dreams to grow up. The peace inside allowed the new industrial boom to grow freely, and the need to keep the army busy and to steer revolutionary energy outward led to wars. In these wars, Bonaparte, claiming he was upholding the "principle of nationalities," tried to add new lands to France. Bismarck, who copied his ideas for Prussia, did the same thing. In 1866, he made his own coup d'état—a revolution from above—against the German Confederation, Austria, and even against the Prussian Konfliktsskammer. But Europe was too small for two Bonapartes, and so history turned out in an ironic way: Bismarck overthrew Bonaparte, and King William of Prussia not only set up a small German empire but also established the French republic. In the end, Europe saw the independence and internal unity of its great nations, except for Poland. It may have been on a small scale, but it was enough so that the growth of the working class would no longer be seriously blocked by national problems. The leaders of the Revolution of 1848 had become the ones carrying out its plans, and next to them, the heir of 1848—the working class in the form of the International—was already rising as a threat.

After the war of 1870–71, Bonaparte disappeared from the scene and Bismarck's mission was finished, so he returned to the role of an ordinary Junker. However, this period was brought to an end by the Paris Commune. A treacherous attempt by Thiers to take the cannon of the Paris National Guard sparked a successful uprising. It was shown once again that in Paris only a working class revolution was possible. After the victory, power automatically and without dispute went to the working class. And yet it was proved again how impossible it was for the working class to truly rule, even twenty years after the time described in our work. On one hand, France abandoned Paris and

watched as it was wounded by the bullets of MacMahon; on the other, the Commune was torn apart by pointless fighting between two groups—the Blanquists (the majority) and the Proudhonists (the minority)—with neither knowing what to do. The victory that came by chance in 1871 turned out to be just as fruitless as the surprise attack of 1848.

Many thought that the fighting working class was finally defeated with the Paris Commune. But in fact, its strongest comeback began with the Commune and the Franco-Prussian War. The calling up of all people who could fight into huge armies of millions, and the use of very powerful guns, bombs, and explosives, changed the way wars were fought. This change quickly ended the Bonapartist war period and allowed industry to grow peacefully by making any war—except a world war with terrible cruelty and unpredictable results—impossible. At the same time, military spending grew very fast, which made taxes go very high and pushed the poor into the arms of socialism. The takeover of Alsace-Lorraine started a wild competition to build arms, which made the rich people of France and Germany fight each other, while the workers of both countries felt united. And the anniversary of the Paris Commune became the first shared holiday for all working people.

The war of 1870–71 and the loss of the Commune moved the center of the European workers' movement from France to Germany, just as Marx had predicted. In France, it took years to heal from the heavy bloodshed of May 1871. In Germany, where industry grew very fast with help from French money, Social-Democracy grew even faster and lasted longer. Because German workers smartly used the right to vote given in 1866, the party grew a lot, as shown by the numbers: 102,000 votes in 1871, 352,000 in 1874, and 493,000 in 1877. Then the government responded with the Anti-Socialist Law, which broke up the party for a while and dropped the votes to 312,000 in 1881. But this setback was quickly overcome, and even without a press, a legal organization, or the right to meet, the party grew fast again—550,000 votes in 1884, 763,000 in 1887, and 1,427,000 in 1890. The government became powerless. When the Anti-Socialist Law was dropped, the socialist vote rose to 1,787,000—more than a quarter of all votes. The government and the rich ruling class had tried every trick, but nothing worked. The clear proof of their weakness, accepted by everyone from the night watchman to the imperial chancellor and shown in millions by the workers, was plain to see. The state was at the end of its strength, while the workers were only just beginning to rise.

Besides that, the German workers gave a second big help to their cause just by being the strongest, most organized, and fastest growing socialist party. They gave workers in other countries a powerful new tool by showing them how to use the right to vote.

France had long allowed everyone to vote, but its voting right lost respect because the Bonapartist government used it in the wrong way. After the Commune, there was no workers' party to use this right. Spain also had universal voting since it became a republic, but in Spain, serious opposition parties had always boycotted elections. The Swiss experience with universal voting was not encouraging for a

workers' party either. In many Latin countries, revolutionary workers saw voting as a trap, a tool for government tricks. In Germany, however, things were different. The Communist Manifesto had already declared that winning universal voting, or democracy, was one of the first and most important tasks for the militant working class, and Lassalle had supported this idea once more. When Bismarck found that he had to introduce voting as the only way to interest most people in his plans, our workers took it seriously and sent August Bebel to the first Reichstag. From that day on, they used voting in a way that benefited them greatly and became a model for workers in all countries. In the words of the French Marxist program, voting was transformed from a means of deception into an instrument of freedom. Even if universal voting had given us only a way to count our numbers every three years, if our quickly rising vote made the workers more sure of victory and made our opponents worry, and if it became our best way to spread our message by showing us our own strength and that of our enemies so that we could act wisely, that would have been enough. But it did much more. It gave us an unmatched way to reach the people who still stayed apart from us. It forced all parties to explain their views and actions before everyone, and it gave our representatives in the Reichstag a platform to speak to both their opponents in parliament and to the public with more power and freedom than they had in the press or at meetings. What good was the Anti-Socialist Law to the government and the rich if our election campaigns and socialist speeches in the Reichstag kept breaking through it?

By using universal voting so successfully, a completely new way for the working class to fight back began, and this method quickly became real. They found that the state institutions, which were organized by the rich, offered the working class extra tools to fight against these very institutions. The workers took part in elections for local assemblies, city councils, and trade courts. They ran for every position where a good number of workers could have a say, competing with the rich. Because of this, the rich and the government began to fear the legal actions of the workers' party more than illegal actions, and they worried more about the results of elections than about those of rebellions.

Here, too, the way of struggle had changed a lot. The old kind of rebellion—fighting in the streets with barricades, which had decided many issues before 1848—was now mostly outdated.

Let's be clear: a true win by a rebellion against an army in street fighting, like one army beating another, is very rare. And the rebels hardly ever expected to win that way. For them, their only hope was to make the soldiers give in to moral pressure—a kind of influence that hardly ever matters when two national armies fight. If they manage to do that, the soldiers do not fight back, or their commanders lose control, and then the rebellion wins. But if they do not succeed, then—even if the army is smaller—the fact that the soldiers have better equipment, training, unified leadership, planned use of forces, and strict discipline makes a big difference. The best a rebellion

can really do in actual battle is to skillfully build and defend one barricade. Working well together, using backup troops, and coordinating actions—things needed even to defend one small area of a town, let alone a whole large town—are very hard to achieve, and usually do not happen at all. It is impossible to gather the military at one key point here. So most of the time, the rebels can only defend passively; they might sometimes launch small attacks on the sides, but usually they only take over spots left by soldiers who are retreating. Also, the army has big guns and fully equipped teams of trained engineers—tools for war that the rebels almost never have. It is no surprise then that even the bravest barricade fights—like those in Paris in June 1848, Vienna in October 1848, and Dresden in May 1849—ended with the rebellion losing once the attack leaders, acting only by military rules and not held back by politics, saw that their soldiers fought as expected.

The many wins of the rebels before 1848 happened for many different reasons. In Paris in July 1830 and February 1848, and in most Spanish street fights, a local civic guard stood between the rebels and the army. This guard either took the side of the rebellion or, by being weak and indecisive, made the soldiers hesitate and even gave weapons to the rebels. When this local guard fought against the rebellion from the start, as in Paris in June 1848, the rebellion was defeated. In Berlin in 1848, the people won partly because many new fighters came during the night and early morning of March 19th, partly because the soldiers were tired and had little food, and partly because their commanders were confused and could not act. In every case, the fight was won because the soldiers did not respond, because their leaders could not decide, or because they were forced to do nothing.

Even in the old days of street fighting, the barricade mostly had a moral effect rather than a big physical one. It was a way to shake the strength of the army. If the barricade held out long enough to weaken the soldiers, the rebels won; if not, they lost. This is the main idea to remember when thinking about how future street fights might go.

Back in 1849, things looked pretty bad. Everywhere, the rich people had sided with the government, praising and celebrating the military that fought against rebellions. The barricade lost its power; soldiers no longer saw it as a shield for "the people" but only as a cover for rebels, troublemakers, looters, equalizers, and the worst of society. Over time, officers learned new street-fighting tactics. They stopped marching straight at makeshift barricades without protection and instead went around them through gardens, yards, and houses. This new way of fighting worked well, succeeding in nine out of ten cases.

Since then, many changes have taken place, all favoring the military. Big cities have grown a lot, but the armies have grown even more. Since 1848, Paris and Berlin have become less than four times larger, yet their garrisons have grown even more. Thanks to railways, these garrisons can more than double in size in twenty-four hours and grow into huge armies in forty-eight hours. Arming these many troops has become

much more effective. In 1848, soldiers used smooth-bore, muzzle-loading percussion guns; today, they use small-caliber, breech-loading magazine rifles that shoot four times as far, ten times more accurately, and ten times faster. Back then, artillery used round shot and grape-shot, which were not very effective; now, one percussion shell can destroy even the best barricade. In the past, sappers used a pick-axe to break through fireproof walls; today they use dynamite cartridges.

On the other hand, all the conditions for the rebels have gotten worse. A rebellion that everyone supports is unlikely to happen again; in class struggles, the middle classes will probably never completely join with the working class, so the reactionary party gathered around the rich will not almost vanish. The people will always be divided, and that powerful advantage, which worked so well in 1848, is gone. If more experienced soldiers joined the rebels, it would be even harder to arm them. The special guns from munitions shops—even if they were not already taken away by the police—are no match for the soldier's magazine rifle, even in close combat. Before 1848, people could make their own ammunition from powder and lead; today, each gun needs its own special cartridge, and these cartridges are complicated products made by big factories. They cannot be made on the spot, so most guns are useless without the right ammunition. Finally, since 1848, new parts of big cities have been built with long, straight, wide streets designed to let new cannons and rifles work their best. A revolutionary would have to be crazy to choose the new working-class districts in the north or east of Berlin for a barricade fight.

Does that mean street fighting will never matter again? Certainly not. It only means that conditions since 1848 have become much worse for regular people fighting and much better for the military. In the future, street fighting can win only if other factors make up for this disadvantage. It will likely happen less often at the start of a great revolution than later and will have to be fought with larger forces. At that time, fighters might prefer an open attack instead of just defending behind barricades, just as happened in the great French Revolution and in Paris on September 4 and October 31, 1870.

Do you now understand why those in power really want us to go where the guns fire and the sabers swing? Why they call us cowards because we do not rush out into the streets, where we know we will lose before we even begin? Why they beg us so eagerly to become nothing more than cannon fodder?

The rich men make all their demands and challenges for nothing at all. We are not that foolish. They might as well tell their enemy in the next war to fight in old-fashioned line formations like the soldiers of Frederick the Great or in the long columns used at battles like Wagram and Waterloo, and to use flintlock guns too. Even though wars between nations have changed, the same is true for the struggle between classes. The days of surprise attacks led by a small, aware group over masses who do not understand are over. When a whole society must change, the people themselves

must join in and truly understand what is at stake, what they are fighting for with their whole bodies and souls.

The past fifty years have taught us this lesson. But for the people to understand what must be done, long and steady work is needed, and that is exactly what we are now doing, with success that makes our enemies lose hope.

In the Latin countries, people are also coming to see that the old ways of fighting must change. Everywhere, the German example of using voting rights to win every position we can get has been copied; and in every place, starting an unplanned attack has been pushed aside. In France, where for more than a hundred years the land has been shaken by one revolution after another, where every party has taken part in plots, uprisings, and all kinds of revolutionary actions, the government cannot fully rely on its army, and the conditions for a sudden uprising are much better than in Germany. Even in France, the Socialists are realizing more and more that they cannot win lasting victory unless they first win over most of the people, such as the peasants in this case. Slow work of spreading ideas and working in parliament are seen here too as the most urgent tasks for the party. They have had many successes. Not only have many local councils been won, but fifty Socialists now have seats in the national parliament, and they have already overthrown three government ministries and a president. In Belgium last year, the workers forced the voting law to be passed and won in one quarter of the districts. In Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, and even in Bulgaria and Romania, Socialists are represented in the parliaments. In Austria, all parties agree that we must be allowed to join the Imperial Council. We will get in, that is certain; the only question now is: through which door? And even in Russia, when the famous Zemsky Sobor meets—that National Assembly to which young Nicholas offers such empty resistance—we can be sure that we will have our own representatives there.

Of course, our comrades in other countries do not give up their right to revolution. The right to revolution is, in fact, the only real "historical right," the one right that all modern states are built on, without exception—including Mecklenburg, where the aristocrats' revolution ended in 1755 with the "hereditary settlement," a document that still supports feudalism today.

This right to revolution is so widely accepted that even General von Boguslawski claims that his Kaiser has the right to a coup d'état only because this right belongs to the people first.

But no matter what happens in other countries, German Social-Democrats have a unique position and, at least for now, a unique job to do. The two million voters they send to the ballot box, along with the young men and women who support them but cannot yet vote, make up the largest, most united, and most powerful force in the international workers' movement. These people already account for more than a quarter of all votes cast, and as seen in recent by-elections, state elections, local council votes, and trade court elections, their numbers keep growing. This growth is happening naturally, steadily, and unstoppably, yet it is also happening calmly, like a

force of nature. The government has tried to stop it, but nothing has worked. Even today, we can count on having two and a quarter million voters. If this continues, by the end of the century, we will have won over most of the middle class, including small business owners and farmers, and we will become the most powerful force in the country, one that no other power can ignore, no matter how much they may want to.

Our main task is to keep this growth going without any interruptions until it becomes too strong for the current government to control. We must not waste our growing power in small, scattered fights but must keep it whole and strong until the day when it truly matters. There is only one thing that could slow down or even temporarily push back the rise of socialism in Germany: a large-scale fight with the military, a bloodbath like the one Paris suffered in 1871. Even then, we would recover in the long run. No army, no matter how many guns it has, can wipe out a movement of millions. But such a fight would disrupt our progress, and we might not have our full strength when the decisive moment arrives. The final battle would take longer, be harder, and cost more lives.

The irony of history flips everything around. We, the so-called "revolutionaries" and "troublemakers," are actually doing much better using legal methods than by trying to overthrow anything. Meanwhile, the so-called parties of "order" are falling apart under the very legal system they created. They cry out in despair, like Odilon Barrot, saying, "Legality is killing us!" But under this same legality, we are getting stronger, healthier, and more unstoppable. And if we are smart enough not to let them trick us into fighting in the streets just to make them happy, then in the end, they will have no choice but to break their own precious laws themselves.

At the same time, they keep making new laws against revolution. Once again, everything is turned upside down. These people, who now act like they are the protectors of stability, weren't they the very ones who caused chaos before? Did we start the civil war of 1866? Did we force the King of Hanover, the Elector of Hesse, and the Duke of Nassau out of their lands and take those lands for ourselves? No, that was them. And yet, these same people who destroyed the German Confederation and three monarchies "by the grace of God" now have the nerve to complain about revolution! It's like the Gracchi brothers complaining about rebellion—who could take such hypocrisy seriously? And the ones who worship Bismarck, the master of political takeovers, dare to criticize overthrow? What a joke!

Let them go ahead and pass their anti-revolution laws, make them even harsher, stretch the entire legal system like rubber—it won't help them at all. The only thing they'll prove is how powerless they really are. If they really want to deal a serious blow to Social-Democracy, they'll have to try something completely different. Right now, Social-Democracy is growing stronger by following the law, and the only way the so-called "parties of order" can stop it is by breaking the law themselves. The Prussian bureaucrat, Mr. Roessler, and the Prussian general, Mr. von Boguslawski, have already pointed out the only real option left for them to use against workers who refuse to fall

for the trap of street fighting. The only thing left is to throw out the constitution, set up a dictatorship, and return to absolute rule—"The King's will is the supreme law!" So go on, gentlemen, if you really mean it, don't hold back! Half-measures won't work; you'll have to go all the way!

But don't forget that the German Empire, like all small states and really all modern states, was built on agreements—first between the princes themselves and then between the princes and the people. If one side breaks that agreement, the whole thing collapses. The other side is no longer bound to follow it, just like Bismarck showed us so clearly in 1866. So if you decide to tear up the Reich's constitution, Social-Democracy will be free to act however it wants toward you. But don't expect us to tell you today exactly what that will look like.

Almost exactly sixteen hundred years ago, there was another dangerous group trying to shake things up in the Roman Empire. They went against the established religion and the foundations of the state. They refused to accept that Caesar's word was the highest law. They didn't belong to just one country but spread across the entire empire—from Gaul to Asia and even beyond its borders. For a long time, they worked in secret, but eventually, they grew strong enough to act in the open. This group, known as the Christians, even had many followers in the army—entire legions were Christian. When they were ordered to take part in religious ceremonies to honor the old gods, these rebellious soldiers protested by putting strange symbols—crosses—on their helmets. Even the usual harsh discipline from their officers couldn't change their minds.

Emperor Diocletian couldn't just stand by while his army's order, obedience, and discipline were falling apart. He decided to take action while he still had the chance. He passed a law—an anti-Socialist law—oh, sorry, I meant an anti-Christian law. It banned the meetings of these troublemakers, shut down or even destroyed their gathering places, and outlawed their symbols, like crosses—just like how red handkerchiefs were banned in Saxony. Christians were barred from holding government positions; they weren't even allowed to become corporals. And since judges back then weren't as "well-trained" in showing favoritism as some laws today assume, Christians weren't even allowed to take legal cases to court.

But even this extreme law didn't work. The Christians mocked it, tore it down from the walls, and some even set fire to the emperor's palace in Nicomedia while he was there. In response, he launched a major persecution of Christians in 303 A.D. It was the last of its kind. And yet, it failed so completely that just seventeen years later, the army was mostly Christian, and the next ruler of the Roman Empire—Constantine, later called "the Great" by priests—declared Christianity the official state religion.

F. Engels

London, March 6, 1895

The work republished here was Marx's first attempt to explain a piece of contemporary history by means of his materialist conception, on the basis of the prevailing economic situation. In the *Communist Manifesto*, the theory was applied in broad outline to the whole of modern history; in the articles by Marx and myself in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, it was constantly used to interpret political events of the day. Here, on the other hand, the question was to demonstrate the inner causal connection in the course of a development which extended over some years, a development as critical, for the whole of Europe, as it was typical; hence, in accordance with the conception of the author, to trace political events back to effects of what were, in the final analysis, economic causes.

If events and series of events are judged by current history, it will never be possible to go back to the *ultimate* economic causes. Even today, when the specialised press provides such rich material, it still remains impossible even in England to follow day by day the movement of industry and trade on the world market and the changes which take place in the methods of production in such a way as to be able to draw a general conclusion for any point in time from these manifold, complicated and ever-changing, factors, the most important of which, into the bargain, generally operate a long time in realms unknown before they suddenly make themselves forcefully felt on the surface. A clear overall view of the economic history of a given period can never be obtained contemporaneously, but only subsequently, after the material has been collected and sifted. Statistics are a necessary auxiliary aid here, and they always lag behind. For this reason, it is only too often necessary in current history to treat this, the most decisive, factor as constant, and the economic situation existing at the beginning of the period concerned as given and unalterable for the whole period, or else to take notice of only such changes in this situation as arise out of the patently manifest events themselves, and are, therefore, likewise patently manifest. So here the materialist method has quite often to limit itself to tracing political conflicts back to the struggles between the interests of the existing social classes and fractions of classes caused by economic development, and to demonstrate that the particular political parties are the more or less adequate political

expression of these same classes and fractions of classes.

It is self-evident that this unavoidable neglect of contemporaneous changes in the economic situation, the very basis of all the processes to be examined, must be a source of error. But all the conditions required for a comprehensive presentation of current history inevitably include sources of error — which, however, keeps nobody from writing current history.

When Marx undertook this work, the source of error mentioned was even more unavoidable. It was simply impossible during the Revolution period of 1848-49 to follow the economic transformations taking place simultaneously or even to keep them in view. It was the same during his first months of exile in London, in the autumn and winter of 1849-50. But that was precisely the time when Marx began this work. And in spite of these unfavourable circumstances, his exact knowledge both of the economic situation in France before, and of the political history of that country after, the February Revolution made it possible for him to present a picture of events which laid bare their inner connections in a way never attained ever since, and which later passed with flying colours the double test applied by Marx himself.

The first test arose when, after the spring of 1850, Marx once again found time for economic studies, and began by applying himself to the economic history of the previous ten years. What he had hitherto deduced, half *a priori*, from sketchy material, thus became absolutely clear to him from the facts themselves, namely that the world trade crisis of 1847 had been the true mother of the February and March revolutions, and that the industrial prosperity which had been returning gradually since the middle of 1848 and attained full bloom in 1849 and 1850 was the revitalising force of a restrengthened European reaction. That was crucially important. Whereas in the first three articles (which appeared in the January, February and March issues of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung Politisch-ökonomische Revue*, Hamburg, 1850) there was still the expectation of an early, fresh upsurge of revolutionary vigour, the historical review written by Marx and myself for the last issue, a double one (May to October), which was

published in the autumn of 1850, breaks with these illusions once and for all: "A new revolution is possible only in consequence of a new crisis. It is, however, just as certain as this crisis." But that was the only major change which had to be made. There was absolutely nothing to alter in the interpretation of events given in the earlier chapters, or in the causal connections established therein, as proved by the continuation of the narrative from March 10 up to the autumn of 1850 in the said review. I have, therefore, included this continuation as the fourth article in the present new edition.

The second test was even more severe. Immediately after Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état of December 2, 1851, Marx dealt afresh with the history of France from February 1848 up to this event which concluded the revolutionary period for the time being. (*Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*. Third edition, Hamburg, Meissner, 1885) In this pamphlet the period depicted in our present publication is again dealt with, albeit in briefer form. Compare this second presentation, written in the light of the decisive event which happened over a year later, with ours and it will be found that the author had very little to change.

What gives our work quite special significance is the fact that it was the first to express the formula in which, by common agreement, the workers' parties of all countries in the world briefly summarise their demand for economic transformation: the appropriation of the means of production by society. In the second chapter, in connection with the "right to work", which is described as "the first clumsy formula wherein the revolutionary demands of the proletariat are summarised", it is said: "but behind the right to work stands the power over capital; behind the power over capital, the *appropriation of the means of production*, their subjection to the associated working class and, therefore, the abolition of wage labour, of capital and of their mutual relations". Thus, here, for the first time, the proposition is formulated by which modern workers' socialism is sharply differentiated both from all the different shades of feudal, bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, etc., socialism and from the confused community of goods of utopian and of primitive [*naturwüchsigen*] workers' communism. If, later, Marx extended the

formula to include appropriation of the means of exchange, this extension, which in any case was self-evident after the *Communist Manifesto*, only expressed a corollary to the main proposition. A few wiseacres in England have of late added that the “means of distribution” should also be handed over to society. These gentlemen would be hard put to say what these economic means of distribution, distinct from the means of production and exchange, actually are; unless *political* means of distribution are meant, taxes, poor relief, including the *Sachsenwald* and other endowments. But, first, these are even now means of distribution in the possession of society as a whole, either of the state or of the community, and second, it is precisely these we want to abolish.

* * *

When the February Revolution broke out, all of us, as far as our conceptions of the conditions and the course of revolutionary movements were concerned, were under the spell of previous historical experience, particularly that of France. It was, indeed, the latter which had dominated the whole of European history since 1789, and from which now once again the signal had gone forth for general revolutionary change. It was, therefore, natural and unavoidable that our conceptions of the nature and the course of the “social” revolution proclaimed in Paris in February 1848, of the revolution of the proletariat, should be strongly coloured by memories of the prototypes of 1789 and 1830. Moreover, when the Paris uprising found its echo in the victorious insurrections in Vienna, Milan and Berlin; when the whole of Europe right up to the Russian frontier was swept into the movement; when thereupon in Paris, in June, the first great battle for power between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was fought; when even the victory of its class so shook the bourgeoisie of all countries that it fled back into the arms of the monarchist-feudal reaction which had just been overthrown — there could be no doubt for us, under the circumstances then obtaining, that the great decisive battle had commenced, that it would have to be fought out in a single, long and vicissitudinous period of revolution, but that it could only end in the final victory of the proletariat.

After the defeats of 1849 we in no way shared the illusions of the vulgar democrats grouped around the future provisional governments *in partibus*. [*In partibus infidelium* — in the land of the infidels, outside reality — an addition to the title of Catholic bishops appointed to non-Christian countries] These vulgar democrats reckoned on a speedy and definitive victory of the “people” over the “tyrants”; we reckoned on a long struggle, after the removal of the “tyrants”, among the antagonistic elements concealed within this “people” itself. The vulgar democrats expected sparks to fly again any day; we declared as early as autumn 1850 that at least the first chapter of the revolutionary period was closed and that nothing was to be expected until the outbreak of a new world economic crisis. For which reason we were excommunicated, as traitors to the revolution, by the very people who later, almost without exception, made their peace with Bismarck — so far as Bismarck found them worth the trouble.

But history has shown us too to have been wrong, has revealed our point of view at that time as an illusion. It has done even more; it has not merely dispelled the erroneous notions we then held; it has also completely transformed the conditions under which the proletariat has to fight. The mode of struggle of 1848 is today obsolete in every respect, and this is a point which deserves closer examination on the present occasion.

All revolutions up to the present day have resulted in the displacement of the rule of one class by the rule of another; but all ruling classes up to now have been only small minorities in relation to the ruled mass of the people. One ruling minority was thus overthrown; another minority seized the helm of state in its stead and refashioned the state institutions to suit its own interests. Thus on every occasion a minority group was enabled and called upon to rule by the given degree of economic development; and just for that reason, and only for that reason, it happened that the ruled majority either participated in the revolution for the benefit of the former or else simply acquiesced in it. But if we disregard the concrete content in each case, the common form of all these revolutions was that they were minority revolutions. Even when the majority took part, it did so — whether wittingly or not — only in the service of a minority; but because of this, or even simply

because of the passive, unresisting attitude of the majority, this minority acquired the appearance of being the representative of the whole people.

As a rule, after the first great success, the victorious minority split; one half was satisfied with what had been gained, the other wanted to go still further, and put forward new demands, which, partly at least, were also in the real or apparent interest of the great mass of the people. In isolated cases these more radical demands were actually forced through, but often only for the moment; the more moderate party would regain the upper hand, and what had been won most recently would wholly or partly be lost again; the vanquished would then cry treachery or ascribe their defeat to accident. In reality, however, the truth of the matter was usually this: the achievements of the first victory were only safeguarded by the second victory of the more radical party; this having been attained, and, with it, what was necessary for the moment, the radicals and their achievements vanished once more from the stage.

All revolutions of modern times, beginning with the great English Revolution of the seventeenth century, showed these features, which appeared inseparable from every revolutionary struggle. They appeared applicable, also, to the struggle of the proletariat for its emancipation; all the more applicable, since precisely in 1848 there were but a very few people who had any idea at all of the direction in which this emancipation was to be sought. The proletarian masses themselves, even in Paris, after the victory, were still absolutely in the dark as to the path to be taken. And yet the movement was there, instinctive, spontaneous, irrepressible. Was not this just the situation in which a revolution had to succeed, led, it is true, by a minority, though this time not in the interest of the minority, but in the finest interest of the majority? If, in all the longer revolutionary periods, it was so easy to win over the great masses of the people simply by the plausible false representations of the pressing minorities, why should they be less susceptible to ideas which were the truest reflection of their economic condition, which were none other than the clear, rational expression of their needs, of needs not yet understood but merely vaguely felt by them? To be sure, this revolutionary mood of the masses had almost always, and usually very speedily,

given way to lassitude or even to a change to the opposite as soon as illusion evaporated and disappointment set in. But what was involved here were not false representations, but the implementation of the most vital interests of the great majority itself, interests which, it is true, were at that time by no means clear to this great majority, but which were bound to become clear to it as their practical implementation proceeded, by their convincing obviousness. And when, as Marx showed in his third article, in the spring of 1850, the development of the bourgeois republic that arose out of the “social” Revolution of 1848 had even concentrated real power in the hands of the big bourgeoisie — monarchistically inclined as it was into the bargain — and, on the other hand, had grouped all the other social classes, peasantry as well as petty bourgeoisie, around the proletariat, so that during and after the common victory, not they but the proletariat grown wise from experience had to become the decisive factor — was there not every prospect then of turning the revolution of the minority into a revolution of the majority?

History has proved us wrong, and all who thought like us. It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production; it has proved this by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has seized the whole of the Continent, and has caused big industry to take real root in France, Austria, Hungary, Poland and, recently, in Russia, while it has made Germany positively an industrial country of the first rank — all on a capitalist basis, which in the year 1848, therefore, still had a great capacity for expansion. But it is precisely this industrial revolution which has everywhere produced clarity in class relations, has removed a number of intermediate forms handed down from the period of manufacture and in Eastern Europe even from guild handicraft, has created a genuine bourgeois and a genuine large-scale industrial proletariat and has pushed them into the foreground of social development. However, owing to this, the struggle between these two great classes, a struggle which, outside England, existed in 1848 only in Paris and, at the most, in a few big industrial centres, has spread over the whole of Europe and reached an intensity still inconceivable in 1848. At that time the many obscure gospels of the sects, with their panaceas;

today the *single* generally recognised, crystal-clear theory of Marx, sharply formulating the ultimate aims of the struggle. At that time the masses, sundered and differing according to locality and nationality, linked only by the feeling of common suffering, undeveloped, helplessly tossed to and fro from enthusiasm to despair; today the *single* great international army of socialists, marching irresistibly on and growing daily in number, organisation, discipline, insight and certainty of victory. If even this mighty army of the proletariat has still not reached its goal, if, far from winning victory by *one* mighty stroke, it has slowly to press forward from position to position in a hard, tenacious struggle, this only proves, once and for all, how impossible it was in 1848 to win social transformation merely by a surprise attack.

A bourgeoisie split into two dynastic-monarchist sections, a bourgeoisie, however, which demanded, above all, peace and security for its financial operations, faced by a proletariat vanquished, indeed, but still a menace, a proletariat around which petty bourgeois and peasants grouped themselves more and more — the continual threat of a violent outbreak, which, nevertheless, offered absolutely no prospect of a final solution — such was the situation, as if made-to-measure for the coup d'état of the third, the pseudo-democratic pretender, Louis Bonaparte. On December 2, 1851, by means of the army, he put an end to the tense situation and secured Europe internal tranquillity, only to confer upon it the blessing of a new era of wars. The period of revolutions from below was concluded for the time being; there followed a period of revolutions from above.

The reversion to the empire in 1851 provided fresh proof of the immaturity of the proletarian aspirations of that time. But it was itself to create the conditions under which they were bound to grow mature. Internal tranquillity ensured the unfettered advancement of the new industrial boom; the necessity of keeping the army occupied and of diverting the revolutionary currents in an outward direction produced the wars in which Bonaparte, under the pretext of asserting the “principle of nationalities”, sought to secure annexations for France. His imitator, Bismarck, adopted the same policy for Prussia; he carried out his coup d'état, his revolution

from above, in 1866, against the German Confederation and Austria, and no less against the Prussian *Konfliktskammer*. But Europe was too small for two Bonapartes and thus the irony of history had it that Bismarck overthrew Bonaparte, and King William of Prussia not only established the little German empire, but also the French republic. The overall outcome, however, was that in Europe the independence and internal unity of the great nations, with the exception of Poland, had become a fact. Within relatively modest limits, it is true, but for all that on a scale large enough to allow the development of the working class to proceed without finding national complications any longer a serious obstacle. The grave-diggers of the Revolution of 1848 had become the executors of its will. And alongside them there already rose threateningly the heir of 1848, the proletariat, in the shape of the *International*.

After the war of 1870-71, Bonaparte vanished from the stage and Bismarck's mission was fulfilled, so that he could now sink back again to the position of an ordinary Junker. The period, however, was brought to a close by the Paris Commune. A perfidious attempt by Thiers to steal the cannon of the Paris National Guard sparked off a victorious rising. It was shown once more that in Paris none but a proletarian revolution is any longer possible. After the victory power fell, quite of itself and quite undisputed, into the hands of the working class. And once again it was proved how impossible even then, twenty years after the time described in our work, this rule of the working class still was. On the one hand, France left Paris in the lurch, looked on while it bled to death from the bullets of MacMahon; on the other hand, the Commune was consumed in unfruitful strife between the two parties which split it, the Blanquists (the majority) and the Proudhonists (the minority), neither of which knew what was to be done. The victory which came as a gift in 1871 remained just as unfruitful as the surprise attack of 1848.

It was believed that the militant proletariat had been finally buried with the Paris Commune. But, completely to the contrary, it dates its most powerful resurgence from the Commune and the Franco-Prussian War. The recruitment of the whole of the population able to bear arms into armies that henceforth could be counted only

in millions, and the introduction of fire-arms, projectiles and explosives of hitherto unprecedented yield, completely transformed all warfare. This revolution, on the one hand, put an abrupt end to the Bonapartist war period and ensured peaceful industrial development by making any war other than a world war of unprecedented cruelty and absolutely incalculable outcome an impossibility. On the other hand, it caused military expenditure to rise in geometrical progression and thereby forced up taxes to exorbitant levels and so drove the poorer classes of people into the arms of socialism. The annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, the immediate cause of the mad competition in armaments, was able to set the French and German bourgeoisie chauvinistically at each other's throats; for the workers of the two countries it became a new bond of unity. And the anniversary of the Paris Commune became the first universal holiday of the whole proletariat.

The war of 1870-71 and the defeat of the Commune transferred the centre of gravity of the European workers' movement in the meantime from France to Germany, as Marx had foretold. In France it naturally took years to recover from the blood-letting of May 1871. In Germany, on the other hand, where industry — fostered, in addition, in positively hothouse fashion by the blessing of the French milliards — developed at increasing speed, Social-Democracy experienced a still more rapid and enduring growth. Thanks to the intelligent use which the German workers made of the universal suffrage introduced in 1866, the astonishing growth of the party is made plain to all the world by incontestable figures: 1871, 102,000; 1874, 352,000; 1877, 493,000 Social-Democratic votes. Then came recognition of this advance by high authority in the shape of the Anti-Socialist Law; the party was temporarily broken up, the number of votes dropped to 312,000 in 1881. But that was quickly overcome, and then, under the pressure of the Exceptional Law, without a press, without a legal organisation and without the right of association and assembly, rapid expansion began in earnest: 1884, 550,000; 1887, 763,000; 1890, 1,427,000 votes. The hand of the state was paralysed. The Anti-Socialist Law disappeared; the socialist vote rose to 1,787,000, over a quarter of all the votes cast. The government and the ruling classes had exhausted all their expedients — uselessly, pointlessly,

unsuccessfully. The tangible proofs of their impotence, which the authorities, from night watchman to the imperial chancellor had had to accept — and that from the despised workers! — these proofs were counted in millions. The state was at the end of its tether, the workers only at the beginning of theirs.

But, besides, the German workers rendered a second great service to their cause in addition to the first, a service performed by their mere existence as the strongest, most disciplined and most rapidly growing socialist party. They supplied their comrades in all countries with a new weapon, and one of the most potent, when they showed them how to make use of universal suffrage.

There had long been universal suffrage in France, but it had fallen into disrepute through the way it had been abused by the Bonapartist government. After the Commune there was no workers' party to make use of it. It had also existed in Spain since the republic but in Spain election boycotts had been the rule for all serious opposition parties from time immemorial. The experience of the Swiss with universal suffrage was also anything but encouraging for a workers' party. The revolutionary workers of the Latin countries had been wont to regard the suffrage as a snare, as an instrument of government trickery. It was different in Germany. The *Communist Manifesto* had already proclaimed the winning of universal suffrage, of democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat, and Lassalle had again taken up this point. Now that Bismarck found himself compelled to introduce this franchise as the only means of interesting the mass of the people in his plans, our workers immediately took it in earnest and sent August Bebel to the first, constituent Reichstag. And from that day on they have used the franchise in a way which has paid them a thousandfold and has served as a model to the workers of all countries. The franchise has been, in the words of the French Marxist programme, *transformé de moyen de duperie qu'il a été jusqu'ici en instrument d'émancipation* — transformed by them from a means of deception, which it was before, into an instrument of emancipation. And if universal suffrage had offered no other advantage than that it allowed us to count our numbers every three years; that by the regularly

established, unexpectedly rapid rise in our vote it increased in equal measure the workers' certainty of victory and the dismay of their opponents, and so became our best means of propaganda; that it accurately informed us of our own strength and that of all opposing parties, and thereby provided us with a measure of proportion second to none for our actions, safeguarding us from untimely timidity as much as from untimely foolhardiness — if this had been the only advantage we gained from the suffrage, it would still have been much more than enough. But it did more than this by far. In election propaganda it provided us with a means, second to none, of getting in touch with the mass of the people where they still stand aloof from us; of forcing all parties to defend their views and actions against our attacks before all the people; and, further, it provided our representatives in the Reichstag with a platform from which they could speak to their opponents in parliament, and to the masses outside, with quite different authority and freedom than in the press or at meetings. Of what avail was their Anti-Socialist Law to the government and the bourgeoisie when election campaigning and socialist speeches in the Reichstag continually broke through it?

With this successful utilisation of universal suffrage, however, an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation, and this method quickly took on a more tangible form. It was found that the state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organised, offer the working class still further levers to fight these very state institutions. The workers took part in elections to particular diets, to municipal councils and to trades courts; they contested with the bourgeoisie every post in the occupation of which a sufficient part of the proletariat had a say. And so it happened that the bourgeoisie and the government came to be much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers' party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion.

For here, too, the conditions of the struggle had changed fundamentally. Rebellion in the old style, street fighting with barricades, which decided the issue everywhere up to 1848, had become largely outdated.

Let us have no illusions about it: a real victory of insurrection over the military in street fighting, a victory as between two armies, is one of the rarest exceptions. And the insurgents counted on it just as rarely. For them it was solely a question of making the troops yield to moral influences which, in a fight between the armies of two warring countries, do not come into play at all or do so to a much smaller extent. If they succeed in this, the troops fail to respond, or the commanding officers lose their heads, and the insurrection wins. If they do not succeed in this, then, even where the military are in the minority, the superiority of better equipment and training, of uniform leadership, of the planned employment of the military forces and of discipline makes itself felt. The most that an insurrection can achieve in the way of actual tactical operations is the proficient construction and defence of a single barricade. Mutual support, the disposition and employment of reserves — in short, concerted and co-ordinated action of the individual detachments, indispensable even for the defence of one borough, not to speak of the whole of a large town, will be attainable only to a very limited extent, and usually not at all. Concentration of the military forces at a decisive point is, of course, out of the question here. Hence passive defence is the predominant form of struggle; an attack will be mounted here and there, by way of exception, in the form of occasional thrusts and assaults on the flanks; as a rule, however, it will be limited to the occupation of positions abandoned by retreating troops. In addition, the military have at their disposal artillery and fully equipped corps of trained engineers, means of warfare which, in nearly every case, the insurgents entirely lack. No wonder, then, that even the barricade fighting conducted with the greatest heroism — Paris, June 1848; Vienna, October 1848; Dresden, May 1849 — ended in the defeat of the insurrection as soon as the leaders of the attack, unhampered by political considerations, acted according to purely military criteria, and their soldiers remained reliable.

The numerous successes of the insurgents up to 1848 were due to a great variety of causes. In Paris, in July 1830 and February 1848, as in most of the Spanish street fighting, a civic guard stood between the insurgents and the military. This guard either sided directly with the insurrection, or else by its lukewarm,

indecisive attitude caused the troops likewise to vacillate, and supplied the insurrection with arms into the bargain. Where this civic guard opposed the insurrection from the outset, as in June 1848 in Paris, the insurrection was vanquished. In Berlin in 1848, the people were victorious partly through considerable reinforcements in the shape of new fighting forces during the night and the morning of March 19th, partly as a result of the exhaustion and poor rations of the troops, and, finally, partly as a result of the paralysis engendered by the command. But in all cases the fight was won because the troops failed to respond, because the commanding officers lost the faculty to decide or because their hands were tied.

Even in the classic time of street fighting, therefore, the barricade produced more of a moral than a material effect. It was a means of shaking the steadfastness of the military. If it held out until this was attained, victory was won; if not, the outcome was defeat. This is the main point which must be kept in view, also when examining the outlook for possible future street fighting. [The last sentence is omitted in *Die Neue Zeit* and in the 1895 edition of *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850*]

Back in 1849 already, this outlook was pretty poor. Everywhere the bourgeoisie had thrown in its lot with the governments, “culture and property” had hailed and feasted the military moving against insurrection. The barricade had lost its magic; the soldier no longer saw behind it “the people”, but rebels, subversives, plunderers, levellers, the scum of society; the officer had in the course of time become versed in the tactical forms of street fighting, he no longer marched straight ahead and without cover against the improvised breastwork, but went round it through gardens, yards and houses. And this was now successful, with a little skill, in nine cases out of ten.

But since then there have been very many more changes, and all in favour of the military. If the big towns have become considerably bigger, the armies have become bigger still. Paris and Berlin have, since 1848, grown less than fourfold, but their garrisons have grown more than that. By means of the railways, these garrisons can, in twenty-four hours, be more than

doubled, and in forty-eight hours they can be increased to huge armies. The arming of this enormously increased number of troops has become incomparably more effective. In 1848 the smooth-bore, muzzle-loading percussion gun, today the small-calibre, breech-loading magazine rifle, which shoots four times as far, ten times as accurately and ten times as fast as the former. At that time the relatively ineffective round shot and grape-shot of the artillery; today the percussion shells, of which one is sufficient to demolish the best barricade. At that time the pick-axe of the sapper for breaking through fire proof walls; today the dynamite cartridge.

On the other hand, all the conditions of the insurgents' side have grown worse. An insurrection with which all sections of the people sympathise is hardly likely to recur; in the class struggle all the middle strata will never in all probability group themselves around the proletariat so exclusively that in comparison the party of reaction gathered round the bourgeoisie will well-nigh disappear. The "people", therefore, will always appear divided, and thus a most powerful lever, so extraordinarily effective in 1848, is gone. If more soldiers who have seen service came over to the insurrectionists, the arming of them would become so much the more difficult. The hunting and fancy guns of the munitions shops — even if not previously made unusable by the removal of part of the lock on police orders — are far from being a match for the magazine rifle of the soldier, even in close fighting. Up to 1848 it was possible to make the necessary ammunition oneself out of powder and lead; today the cartridges differ for each gun, and are everywhere alike only in one point, namely, that they are a complicated product of big industry, and therefore not to be manufactured *ex tempore*, with the result that most guns are useless as long as one does not possess the ammunition suited only to them. And, finally, since 1848 the newly built quarters of the big cities have been laid out in long, straight, broad streets, tailor-made to give full effect to the new cannons and rifles. The revolutionary would have to be mad to choose of his own accord the new working class districts in the north or east of Berlin for a barricade fight.

Does that mean that in the future street fighting will no longer play any role? Certainly not. It only means that the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavourable for civilian fighters and far more favourable for the military. In future, street fighting can, therefore, be victorious only if this disadvantageous situation is compensated by other factors. Accordingly, it will occur more seldom at the beginning of a great revolution than at its later stages, and will have to be undertaken with greater forces. These, however, may then well prefer, as in the whole great French Revolution or on September 4 and October 31, 1870, in Paris, the open attack to passive barricade tactics.

Does the reader now understand why the powers-that-be positively want to get us to go where the guns shoot and the sabres slash? Why they accuse us today of cowardice, because we do not take without more ado to the streets, where we are certain of defeat in advance? Why they so earnestly implore us to play for once the part of cannon fodder?

The gentlemen pour out their petitions and their challenges for nothing, for absolutely nothing. We are not that stupid. They might just as well demand from their enemy in the next war that he should accept battle in the line formation of old Fritz, [Frederick II] or in the columns of whole divisions à la Wagram and Waterloo, and with the flint-lock in his hands at that. If conditions have changed in the case of war between nations, this is no less true in the case of the class struggle. The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of masses lacking consciousness is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul.

The history of the last fifty years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long, persistent work is required, and it is just this work that we are now pursuing, and with a success which drives the enemy to despair.

In the Latin countries, too, it is being realised more and more that the old tactics must be revised. Everywhere the German example of utilising the

suffrage, of winning all posts accessible to us, has been imitated; everywhere the unprepared launching of an attack has been relegated to the background. [In *Die Neue Zeit* and in the 1895 edition of *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* the words “everywhere the unprepared launching of an attack has been relegated to the background” are omitted.] In France, where for more than a hundred years the ground has been undermined by one revolution after another, where there is not a single party which has not done its share in conspiracies, insurrections and all other revolutionary actions; in France, where, as a result, the government is by no means sure of the army and where the conditions for an insurrectionary coup de main are altogether far more favourable than in Germany — even in France the Socialists are realising more and more that no lasting victory is possible for them unless they first win over the great mass of the people, i.e. the peasants in this instance. Slow propaganda work and parliamentary activity are recognised here, too, as the immediate tasks of the party. Successes have not been lacking. Not only have a whole series of municipal councils been won; fifty Socialists have seats in the Chambers, and they have already overthrown three ministries and a president of the republic. In Belgium last year the workers forced the adoption of the franchise, and have been victorious in a quarter of the constituencies. In Switzerland, in Italy, in Denmark, yes, even in Bulgaria and Rumania the Socialists are represented in the parliaments. In Austria all parties agree that our admission to the Imperial Council can no longer be withheld. We will get in, that is certain; the only question still in dispute is: by which door? And even in Russia, when the famous *Zemsky Sobor* meets — that National Assembly to which young Nicholas offers such vain resistance — even there we can reckon with certainty on being represented in it.

Of course, our foreign comrades do not in the least renounce their right to revolution. The right to revolution is, after all, the only *really* “historical right”, the only right on which all modern states rest without exception, Mecklenburg included, whose aristocratic revolution was ended in 1755 by the “hereditary settlement”, the glorious charter of feudalism still valid today.

The right to revolution is so incontestably recognised in the general consciousness that even General von Boguslawski derives the right to a coup d'état, which he vindicates for his Kaiser, solely from this popular right.

But whatever may happen in other countries, the German Social-Democrats occupy a special position and thus, at least in the immediate future, have a special task. The two million voters whom they send to the ballot box, together with the young men and women who stand behind them as non-voters, form the most numerous, most compact mass, the decisive "shock force" of the international proletarian army. This mass already supplies over a quarter of the votes cast; and as the by-elections to the Reichstag, the Diet elections in individual states, the municipal council and trades court elections demonstrate, it is constantly on the increase. Its growth proceeds as spontaneously, as steadily, as irresistibly, and at the same time as tranquilly as a natural process. All government intervention has proved powerless against it. We can count even today on two and a quarter million voters. If it continues in this fashion, by the end of the century we shall have the greater part of the middle strata of society, petty bourgeoisie and small peasants, and we shall grow into the decisive power in the land, before which all other powers will have to bow, whether they like it or not. To keep this growth going without interruption until it gets beyond the control of the prevailing governmental system of itself, not to fritter away this daily increasing shock force in vanguard skirmishes, but to keep it intact until the decisive day, [In *Die Neue Zeit* and in the 1895 edition of *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* the words "not to fritter away this daily increasing shock force in vanguard skirmishes, but to keep it intact until the decisive day" are omitted.] that is our main task. And there is only one means by which the steady rise of the socialist fighting forces in Germany could be temporarily halted, and even thrown back for some time: a clash on a grand scale with the military, a blood-letting like that of 1871 in Paris. In the long run even that would be overcome. To shoot a party which numbers millions out of existence is too much even for all the magazine rifles of Europe and America. But the normal development would be impeded, the shock force would, perhaps, not be available at the critical moment, the decisive combat [In *Die Neue Zeit* and in the 1895

edition of *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* the words “the shock force would, perhaps, not be available at the critical moment” are omitted and instead of “the decisive combat” the word “decision” is printed.] would be delayed, protracted and attended by a heavier toll.

The irony of world history turns everything upside down. We, the “revolutionaries”, the “overthrowers” — we are thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal methods and overthrow. The parties of order, as they call themselves, are perishing under the legal conditions created by themselves. They cry despairingly with Odilon Barrot: *la légalité nous tue*, legality is the death of us; whereas we, under this legality, get firm muscles and rosy cheeks and look like life eternal. And if *we* are not so crazy as to let ourselves be driven to street fighting in order to please them, then in the end there is nothing left for them to do but themselves break through this dire legality.

Meanwhile they make new laws against overthrows. Again everything is turned upside down. These anti-overthrow fanatics of today, are they not themselves the overthrowers of yesterday? Have *we* perchance evoked the civil war of 1866? Have *we* driven the King of Hanover, the Elector of Hesse, and the Duke of Nassau from their hereditary lawful domains and annexed these hereditary domains? And these overthrowers of the German Confederation and three crowns by the grace of God complain of overthrow! *Quis tulerit Gracchos de seditione querentes?* [Who would suffer the Gracchi to complain of sedition?, Juvenal, *Satire*, 11.24] Who could allow the Bismarck worshippers to rail at overthrow?

Let them, nevertheless, put through their anti-overthrow bills, make them still worse, transform the whole penal law into india-rubber, they will gain nothing but fresh proof of their impotence. If they want to deal Social-Democracy a serious blow they will have to resort to quite other measures. They can cope with the Social-Democratic overthrow, which just now is doing so well by keeping the law, only by an overthrow on the part of the parties of Order, an overthrow which cannot live without breaking the law. Mr. Roessler, the Prussian bureaucrat, and Mr. von Boguslawski, the Prussian general, have shown them the only way

perhaps still possible of getting at the workers, who simply refuse to let themselves be lured into street fighting. Breach of the constitution, dictatorship, return to absolutism, *regis voluntas suprema lex* ! [The King's will is the supreme law!]. Therefore, take courage, gentlemen; here half measures will not do; here you must go the whole hog!

But do not forget that the German empire, like all small states and generally all modern states, is a *product of contract*; of the contract, first, of the princes with one another and, second, of the princes with the people. If one side breaks the contract, the whole contract falls to the ground; the other side is then also no longer bound, as Bismarck demonstrated to us so beautifully in 1866. If, therefore, you break the constitution of the Reich, Social-Democracy is free, and can do as it pleases with regard to you. But it will hardly blurt out to you today what it is going to do then. [In *Die Neue Zeit* and in the 1895 edition of *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* the end of this paragraph starting with the words "as Bismarck" is omitted.]

It is now, almost to the year, sixteen centuries since a dangerous party of overthrow was likewise active in the Roman empire. It undermined religion and all the foundations of the state; it flatly denied that Caesar's will was the supreme law; it was without a fatherland, was international; it spread over the whole empire, from Gaul to Asia, and beyond the frontiers of the empire. It had long carried on seditious activities underground in secret; for a considerable time, however, it had felt itself strong enough to come out into the open. This party of overthrow, which was known by the name of Christians, was also strongly represented in the army; whole legions were Christian. When they were ordered to attend the sacrificial ceremonies of the pagan established church, in order to do the honours there, the subversive soldiers had the audacity to stick peculiar emblems — crosses — on their helmets in protest. Even the customary barrack bullying of their superior officers was fruitless. The Emperor Diocletian could no longer quietly look on while order, obedience and discipline in his army were being undermined. He stepped in with vigour, while there was still time. He promulgated an anti-Socialist — I beg your pardon, I meant to say anti-Christian-law. The meetings of the overthrowers

were forbidden , their meeting halls were closed or even pulled down, the Christian emblems, crosses, etc., were, like the red handkerchiefs in Saxony, prohibited. Christians were declared ineligible for holding public office; they were not to be allowed to become even corporals. Since at that time there were no judges so well trained in “respect of persons” as Mr. von Köller’s anti-overthrow bill assumes, Christians were forbidden out of hand to seek justice before a court. Even this exceptional law was to no avail. The Christians tore it down from the walls with scorn; they are even supposed to have set fire to the Emperor’s palace in Nicomedia in his presence. Then the latter revenged himself by the great persecution of Christians in the year 303 A.D. It was the last of its kind. And it was so effective that seventeen years later the army consisted overwhelmingly of Christians, and the succeeding autocrat of the whole Roman empire, Constantine, called the Great by the priests, proclaimed Christianity the state religion.

F. Engels

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